

BV

1533

T85

Loan To
Div

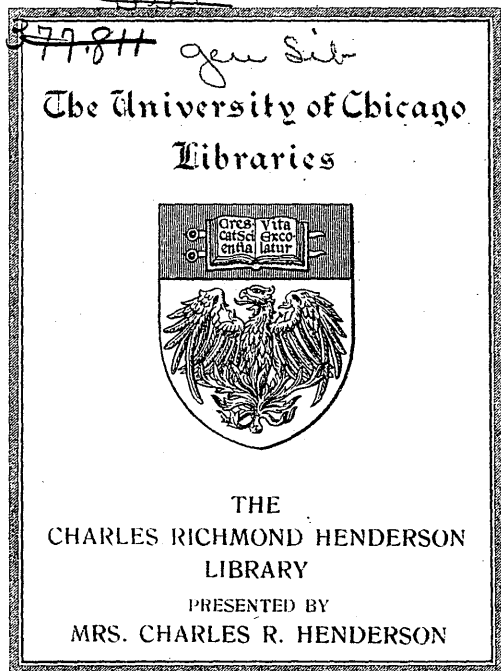
TEACHERS' MEETINGS

THEIR NECESSITY
AND METHODS

H Clay Trumbull

C.R. Anderson

377.811 University of Chicago
F77



TEACHERS'-MEETINGS

Their Necessity and Methods

C. R. Henderson

BY
H. CLAY TRUMBULL



PHILADELPHIA
GEORGE W. JACOBS & CO.
PUBLISHERS

TO
YRABILL COACHING

BV1533

T85
Loan to Div.

COPYRIGHT, 1896,
BY
H. CLAY TRUMBULL

510622

I.

A Necessity in Every School

I

A Necessity in Every School

The "teachers'-meeting," as that term is employed in America, is a weekly gathering of the teachers of the Sunday-school for conference over the next lesson which they are to teach to their scholars. In Great Britain, such a gathering is known as the "preparation class." It matters little, however, what the gathering is called, if only its nature and purpose be understood while its discussion is in progress.

Not every Sunday-school has a teachers'-meeting; yet without a teachers'-meeting there can be no true Sunday-school. This paradox represents a truth that cannot safely be lost sight of in considering the Sunday-school and its needs. In the very nature of the Sunday-school, a teachers'-meeting is a necessity; and without a teachers'-meeting a Sunday-school in

Teachers'-Meetings

name is not really a Sunday-school in fact. It lacks a prime essential.

The modern Sunday-school in its integrity includes the grouping of children and others into separate classes under individual teachers for the study of the Bible, and the combining of those separate classes into a school whole for united work under a common influence. Without the grouping into classes, there is no opportunity of reaching the scholars individually. Without the combining of the groups into a common whole, there can be no unity of impression on the entire membership of the school.

In a true Sunday-school there must be both class work and school work, class instruction and school instruction, class influence and school influence. All this cannot be secured unless the leaders of the separate groups are brought together in order to secure a common understanding of their work and a fulness of mutual sympathy and purpose in its prosecution; and for this a teachers'-meeting is necessary.

A Necessity in Every School

Without a teachers'-meeting there is no agreement possible in the teachings of the various teachers in a Sunday-school; nor is there any prospect of bringing up the poorer teachers in that school to the standard of those best qualified. If the teachers of a Sunday-school are not brought together to compare the results of their separate study, and to quicken one another's minds by mutual suggestions and corrections, they are not likely, on the one hand, to be in accord in their understanding or their teaching of the lesson they are to teach; or, on the other hand, to be severally as well prepared for their teaching as if each one of them were possessed of the best thoughts and the wisest preparations of all.

It is more than twenty-six centuries since the inspired prophet Amos asked: "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" and in all this time his question has never been answered affirmatively. An equally important question, especially for the teachers in the same Sunday-

Teachers'-Meetings

school, is this: "Can two be sure they are agreed unless they come together before they begin their common walk?" In fact, without a teachers'-meeting a Sunday-school at its best is not so much one school as it is an aggregation of schools; each class being a little school by itself, without the gain which might come from the shared labors and attainments of its immediate neighbors.

It matters not, so far, whether the superintendent be of average or of superior ability. The best superintendent in the world would be unable, without the aid of a teachers'-meeting, to have such a Sunday-school as he could have with the aid of a teachers'-meeting; for the teachers'-meeting is the chief agency of systematic and controlling organization in a Sunday-school.

Men wise as "children of this world," or as "children of light," have been quick to recognize the value of councils in order to secure union of effort and unity of thought in organized

A Necessity in Every School

work for aggressive action. Brigham Young was accustomed to gather his Mormon local preachers and his Sunday-school teachers in Salt Lake City, every Saturday afternoon, to instruct them as to what they were to preach and teach the next day. That was one cause of his remarkable hold on and power over the Mormon people. It is quite as important to have unity of teaching from the Bible, as unity of teaching from the Book of Mormon.

The superior efficiency of an army over a mob is not in its leadership so much as in its systematic organization. The ablest military commander conceivable would never expect to transform a mob into an army unless he could have all its membership under officers whom he had trained for the work, and whom he expected to train and guide in the work. The mere assignment of subordinates to positions of responsibility in the organization by which the commander would bring a mob to army standards, could not compass the work of transfor-

Teachers'-Meetings

mation. Those officers must themselves be schooled together by that commander, in order to do their part severally and conjointly in that transforming process.

The teachers'-meeting is the Sunday-school's "school of officers," whereby those who are leaders of groups may be made intelligent co-workers in a Sunday-school regiment. Without such an agency of organization no Sunday-school gathering of detached companies can become a regimental unit. In short, a Sunday-school without a teachers'-meeting is but midway in the process of transformation from a portion of the popular mob to a portion of the Sunday-school army.

It is not that a Sunday-school superintendent is a military commander, and that his teachers'-meeting will enable him to drill and discipline his school through his subordinate officers. Nor is it that the superintendent is alone responsible for the character and methods of the instruction given in the school, and that by

A Necessity in Every School

means of a teachers'-meeting he can tell his teachers just what they may teach, and how. But it is that without a teachers'-meeting no superintendent can fully know the measure and needs of his teachers severally, or be able intelligently to give them help, and to make them helpful to others and to himself.

In whatever light a superintendent's work as a superintendent may be viewed, it is impossible for him to perfect an organization in his school that shall give him the opportunity to know his teachers thoroughly and to make use of them wisely, unless he has them together week by week while they are preparing for their common work.

How otherwise can a superintendent ascertain the measure of intelligence and consecration of his teachers severally, and be able to say whether or not they are doing their work as they ought to do it? How otherwise can he bring up the standard of the poorer teachers, and make available to them the information and

Teachers' = Meetings

enthusiasm and devotedness of his best teachers? Through what other agency can he both sift and train his teachers, and make himself felt by them all in their class work and in their school work?

Without this means of intercourse with his teachers collectively, and this means of observing and guiding them in their preparation for what they have to do in the school which he superintends, a superintendent is little more than a leader of the general exercises of the school, without the opportunity of knowing and aiding the teachers in their several and collective needs. The class-teaching may be very good or very poor, for all that he knows or does. Practically, there are as many schools as there are classes, under his oversight. There is no one school current of good teaching in his school; for it is only by means of the channel of a teachers'-meeting that a school current can be made to flow through a Sunday-school. The teachers do not know whether or not they are in agreement in their spirit and methods of

A Necessity in Every School

teaching ; and whatever their personal will may be, they cannot really be "working together" with God.

While the teachers'-meeting is essential to the very existence of a true Sunday-school as a true Sunday-school, and to the proper work of a teacher in his relation to his fellow-teachers and to the Sunday-school as a whole, it is also essential to the best preparation of the best teacher in any Sunday-school for his work as a teacher, in his immediate sphere of class-teaching. That the poorest teachers need the quickening influence and the instruction of a conference with their fellow-teachers in preparation for teaching, all will admit. That the best teachers can do better with such an aid than without it, the best teachers are always prompt to recognize.

Both in knowledge and in zeal we are stimulated by contact with our fellows. "Two are better than one"—in study ; "because they have a good reward for their labor." As "iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the coun-

Teachers'-Meetings

tenance of his friend"—in the teachers'-meeting. "Two eyes see more than one," says quaint old Matthew Henry. "Wise and profitable discourse sharpens men's wits; and those who have ever so much knowledge may, by conference, have something added to them."

In addition to the gain of knowledge concerning the lesson and its teaching that may come to the best informed teacher through his attendance at the teachers'-meeting, there is a gain to such a teacher through the disclosures in the teachers'-meeting of unsuspected difficulties in the understanding of the lesson by teachers of average ability. Many a well-informed teacher would fail to touch upon points in the lesson which peculiarly need explanation to his scholars, if he were not warned of the danger of misconception just there by what he hears in the teachers'-meeting before he meets his class.

Rarely, indeed, does any teacher, however well prepared for his work he may have thought himself on going to the teachers'-meeting, come

A Necessity in Every School

away from a conference over the lesson of the week with his fellow-teachers without feeling the necessity of changing his plan of teaching at some point which has been brought before his mind in new prominence during the discussions of that gathering. The fresh views of other teachers are almost sure to affect his views.

The more a man knows about Sunday-school work, the more he values the teachers'-meeting as a help to his school and to his teachers if he is a superintendent, and to himself as a teacher if he is a teacher. At the first Sunday-school Assembly at the now famous camp-ground of Chautauqua, the writer of these words led a conference of superintendents in a free discussion concerning their official relation to the Sunday-schools of their charge. There were one hundred and thirty-seven superintendents in that conference. They were of ten or a dozen different denominations, and from various portions of our common country. One hundred and thirty-five of the one hundred and thirty-seven de-

Teachers' = Meetings

clared it to be their deliberate conviction that the teachers'-meeting is absolutely indispensable to the success of a Sunday-school.

That was quite a number of years ago. There has been progress since then. It is to be hoped that there could not now be found two out of a hundred and thirty-seven good superintendents who would suppose it possible to have such a Sunday-school as he ought to have without a teachers'-meeting.

The writer of these words is now a Bible-class teacher in a well-conducted Sunday-school. He has been in Sunday-school work for more than forty years. His special duties, outside of the Sunday-school, require of him the careful study of the Sunday-school lessons of the International series, in advance of their use in the school where he is a teacher, including an examination of the best helps available to any Sunday-school teacher. He would not venture, as a rule, to go to his class as a teacher without the help of the teachers'-meeting of his Sunday-

A Necessity in Every School

school. If he did venture to go without this needed aid, the members of his class would note the lack.

Apart from the question of any service which he might render to others by his share in the exercises of that gathering for mutual lesson-study, he values and feels the need of its stimulus and instructions for himself. And his opinion, as based on his experience and observation in the Sunday-school field, is, that any man who knows enough to be a good Sunday-school teacher knows that he cannot teach as he ought to teach without the help of the teachers'-meeting.

As to zeal and enthusiasm, as well as union in the Sunday-school teachers' common work, the question of Qoheleth still seems timely and pertinent, "How can one be warm alone?" Moreover, as to the teachers'-meeting, the Apostle's exhortation should be remembered: "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works; not forsaking the assembling

Teachers'-Meetings

of ourselves together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another [and stimulating and assisting one another]; and so much the more, as ye see the day drawing nigh."

There is now greater need than ever of the help that comes to the Sunday-school through the teachers'-meeting. And the teachers'-meeting was never more of an essential in every Sunday-school.

II

Feasible Everywhere

II

Feasible Everywhere

That which must be, can be. A thing that is a necessity in this world is practically attainable. Hence it follows, that, because a teachers'-meeting for conference over the next lesson is essential to the integrity of a Sunday-school as a Sunday-school, therefore a teachers'-meeting is feasible in any and every Sunday-school. There may be difficulties in the way of such a gathering, as there are likely to be in all paths of human duty, but those difficulties ought to be overcome, must be overcome, and can be overcome.

Many a Sunday-school in the country is held at a church or in a schoolhouse that is reasonably central to its constituency; but its teachers are widely scattered throughout the extended parish or township, and it seems next to im-

Teachers' Meetings

possible to bring them together at any common point—except at the hour of their ordinary Sunday-school session. A large proportion of the teachers are of the gentler sex. It would hardly do for them to grope their way unattended over the lonely country roads to a teachers'-meeting on a week-day evening. On Sundays they could have the company of members of their family who attend the other church services, but on a week-day evening they would find no such escort.

During a considerable portion of the year the country roads are wellnigh impassable; it is difficult enough to travel over them by daylight on Sundays: to add the burden of a week-day evening journey seems unreasonable. The Sunday-school room is not likely to be warmed during the week-time in the winter months; and, at the best, it is an unsocial place for a small number of teachers to gather. For these and other reasons a teachers'-meeting is in many a country Sunday-school deemed impracticable.

Feasible Everywhere

In city Sunday-schools the difficulties in the way of a teachers'-meeting are not the same as in the country; but they are positive and diverse. If it is a church Sunday-school, the teachers are likely to be persons whose time is closely occupied with the various engagements and activities of social life in the city. Their service in the Sunday-school is purely voluntary: to ask them to add a week-day evening in addition to their Sunday service seems to many of them quite too much.

If it be a mission-school, its location may be at a long distance from the homes of the teachers generally, and in a quarter of the city where some of the teachers would deem it unwise to go by themselves on a week-day evening. And however desirable, on general principles, a teachers'-meeting may be, most of the teachers in many a Sunday-school do not feel a binding obligation on them to attend one; hence a teachers'-meeting is not deemed practically feasible in every city Sunday-school.

Teachers'-Meetings

Just when to have a teachers'-meeting and where to hold it, are not always clear, yet the time and place must be decided on as preliminary to the necessary meeting. Again, in both city and country Sunday-schools there often seems to be a lack of a really good leader for the teachers'-meeting. The pastor may not be ready to undertake this work, or he may be unfitted for it; for many a good preacher is a very poor teacher. The superintendent who is well qualified for the other duties of his position, may be obviously unsuited to this service. No one teacher may appear to have pre-eminent fitness for the leadership. Even though all other difficulties were removed, this one would still have to be faced. A teachers'-meeting must have a leader; but, as yet, in many a Sunday-school the right person for a leader has not been found.

That these difficulties in the way of a teachers'-meeting are real difficulties, cannot be questioned. But that they are only difficulties, and not

Feasible Everywhere

barriers, is also obvious. They are difficulties to be met and overcome, not barriers to forbid all hope of progress. This is a truth that ought to be recognized by every superintendent who realizes that a teachers'-meeting is a necessity in his Sunday-school, and that he must have it—in spite of the difficulties in its way. Not all of the difficulties noted are to be found in any one Sunday-school. Each school has its own difficulties, which it must meet in its own way. But if all the difficulties noted, and a great many more, were to be found in a single Sunday-school, they could all be met and removed—because they must be.

Where the teachers of a country Sunday-school are widely scattered, and many of them would be unable to reach a common center without an escort, it is quite feasible to secure a team, or teams, to go from house to house on the evening of the teachers'-meeting, and take the teachers to the place of gathering. This plan is every way practicable. It has been pur-

Teachers' Meetings

sued in various places for a series of years, and it might well be adopted more generally.

In some cases a half-dozen teachers can be brought from one direction by one team, a half-dozen more from another direction by another team, and so on all over the area of the Sunday-school field. In other cases an omnibus, or a "barge," or a "band-wagon," or a large carryall, could go the rounds more generally, and pick up the teachers from their houses severally. Such an arrangement can be made, with a little forethought, in almost any community, as it already has been made in many a community.

The difficulty of bad roads in a country township is, after all, no greater on the evening of a teachers'-meeting than on the evening of a wedding, or of a social party, or of a singing-school; and there are few country townships in which the roads would be deemed a positive barrier to assemblings of this sort during any considerable portion of the year. If, indeed, the roads are deemed practically impassable after nightfall, the

Feasible Everywhere

teachers'-meeting could be held on a week-day afternoon, as the mid-week prayer-meeting is ordinarily held in many a country parish.

During the hours of daylight, at least, the country roads are available for travel. Bad roads are a difficulty in country communities, as they still are in our larger American cities; but they are not wholly a barrier to locomotion, in either region, when people feel that they must be on the move.

If the church, or the school-house, where the Sunday-school has its sessions, is not a convenient or comfortable place for a mid-week gathering, the teachers'-meeting can be held at the house of the superintendent, or at some house in a more central location; or it can meet at different places, in different portions of the general field, from week to week, or from month to month. Where it is held is of minor importance in comparison with the fact that it be held somewhere.

The time of holding a teachers'-meeting is,

Teachers' Meetings

like the place of such a meeting, important, yet subordinate to the fact of its holding. The better way is to have an evening, or an afternoon, of a week-day, devoted to this gathering. The object is worthy of time enough, and the best time. If the choice had to be made, a church would be the gainer by having a teachers'-meeting instead of a mid-week prayer-meeting, rather than by consenting to do without a teachers'-meeting. But the teachers'-meeting might be held, in an emergency, on the same evening, or afternoon, as the mid-week prayer-meeting; the former preceding or following the latter. Or, again, it might be held on a Sunday, just before or just after the regular school session; in the one case, the lesson considered being that of the day, and in the other case the lesson being that for the Sunday following.

Either of these alternative plans would be simply better than nothing; not a "half loaf," but a bare bite. At one time or another, as at one place or another, and in one way or another,

Feasible Everywhere

the teachers'-meeting is feasible in any country Sunday-school, as it is an imperative necessity in every Sunday-school.

If there is a comfortable church parlor, or a teachers'-meeting room at the church, well furnished, and supplied with a table around which all can gather cosily, that is a good place for the meeting. But, ordinarily, the Sunday-school room on a week-day evening, is a dreary and comfortless spot. A private house is more attractive. It helps the social element, which ought not to be lost sight of in such a gathering. It is commonly better to have the meeting continuously at one house, so that all shall know where to find it; but in country districts, the moving from house to house, so as to equalize the travel, is generally preferred. There are regions where the teachers are so widely scattered as to make several meetings, rather than one, almost a necessity—the teachers of the different districts grouping by themselves on teachers'-meeting evening or afternoon. But

Teachers'-meetings

this is an exceptional necessity. It is referred to only to show that a teachers'-meeting, in whole or in part, is possible anywhere.

Well-conducted teachers'-meetings have been sustained for years in many scattered country communities, in summer and winter alike, in spite of all the obstacles to such gatherings generally. The writer was attending, in the winter time, a county Sunday-school convention in Vermont, on the border of Canada, where, out of thirty-three Sunday-schools represented, fourteen reported teachers'-meetings. These were all country schools, among the hills, with the difficulties of rough roads, heavy snows, and scant and scattered population, to be overcome. At some of these meetings from one-half to two-thirds of the entire number of teachers were present, on an average, even in midwinter.

And that Vermont county was not alone in this record. From Maine to Minnesota, similar country neighborhoods show similar success in the sustaining of teachers'-meetings.

Feasible Everywhere

When a country superintendent in New Jersey wrote to the editor of *The Sunday School Times*, saying that it was practically impossible to get his teachers together for a teachers'-meeting, because of their being so widely scattered in a rural township, the editor responded :

"How is it about funerals in your region? Can you get up a fair gathering on a week-day to bury the dead? If you can, you don't want to admit—do you?—that your good people will do more to bury a dead body than to save a live soul?

"And then, again, did you ever see a turn-out of teams and foot-passengers to attend a circus or a menagerie—a 'great moral show'—in your part of the country? Perhaps you never had a country singing-school in that corner of the world! And the young people never could be induced to come together for an evening party, or for anything short of a regular church service on Sunday! Nonsense! Some of the best teachers'-meetings in the world are in scattered

Teachers'-Meetings

country communities, where the teachers have to be picked up one by one, or two and two, and brought up to the superintendent's house ; or where the teachers'-meeting is ' held around ' on circuit."

A Rhode Island superintendent, in a country Sunday-school, reported to that editor, that, while his seventeen teachers were scattered over a field of from three to five miles' sweep, a teachers'-meeting had been kept up faithfully for fully fifteen years. As to the method of getting together the ladies who were " dependent on others for a way to pass over muddy roads," he said :

" Our pastor has a team, and he takes all who will accompany him from his section. The superintendent, living a mile or a mile and a half distant from his pastor, is always glad to take a full load from his neighborhood ; he having had a large spring-wagon fitted up for the purpose, which will accommodate nine. A lantern is carried in dark nights, as he goes from

Feasible Everywhere

house to house to get the party together. [A word to other country superintendents: 'Let *your* light so shine' in your field of labor.] Teachers who have teams call at various residences along the route; and thus they are gathered."

This illustration would seem to meet, in one way, the question, how to get the teachers together at a teachers'-meeting in the country.

The spirit which would meet and overcome the surface difficulties in the way of a teachers'-meeting in the country, would triumph quite as surely over the correspondent difficulties in the city. It is true that it is not always easy for a city worker to find time for due preparation for the special Christian duties that he has volunteered to perform; but it is equally true that he *must* find time, and therefore *can* find it, to make whatever preparation is needful for any good work that he has volunteered to attend to. Hence it is that a teacher's failure to take time during the week for the preparation service that

Teachers' = Meetings

is represented in the teachers'-meeting, is his failure to be a competent teacher in his place on Sunday.

A teachers'-meeting ought to be conducted by the best man available—all things considered. If the pastor is the best man for this work, as in many churches he is, he ought to be secured for it, if possible. But to be the best man for this work a pastor must know something about Sunday-schools, something about scholars and teachers, and something about teaching. It is not enough for him to be sound in doctrine and a good preacher. He must be able to show his teachers *how* to teach the truth which they and he value; and this he will not have learned in the average theological seminary or divinity school. There are many pastors who do not profess to know much about Sunday-schools, nor care to attempt the training of their teachers. There are other pastors who are competent for this work, but who prefer to have it done by others.

Feasible Everywhere

Next to the pastor comes the superintendent as a desirable leader of the teachers'-meeting. If he is best fitted for that service, he ought to be pressed into it and kept at it, however he may shrink from it. There are cases, however, where the superintendent is an excellent manager of the school as a whole, while he is not so well fitted to train and lead his teachers as is some one of their number. In such a case—as, in fact, in every case—the best man available for the special service ought to be secured for that service.

The better the leader of a teachers'-meeting, the better the teachers'-meeting. Whether he be the pastor, the superintendent, or one of the teachers, if he can lead the teachers wisely in their conference over the lesson they are set to teach, they will be the gainers by thus being led.

But, after all, it is the conference over their lesson by the teachers that is the thing of chief importance in a teachers'-meeting; and a conference can be secured where its leader is in no

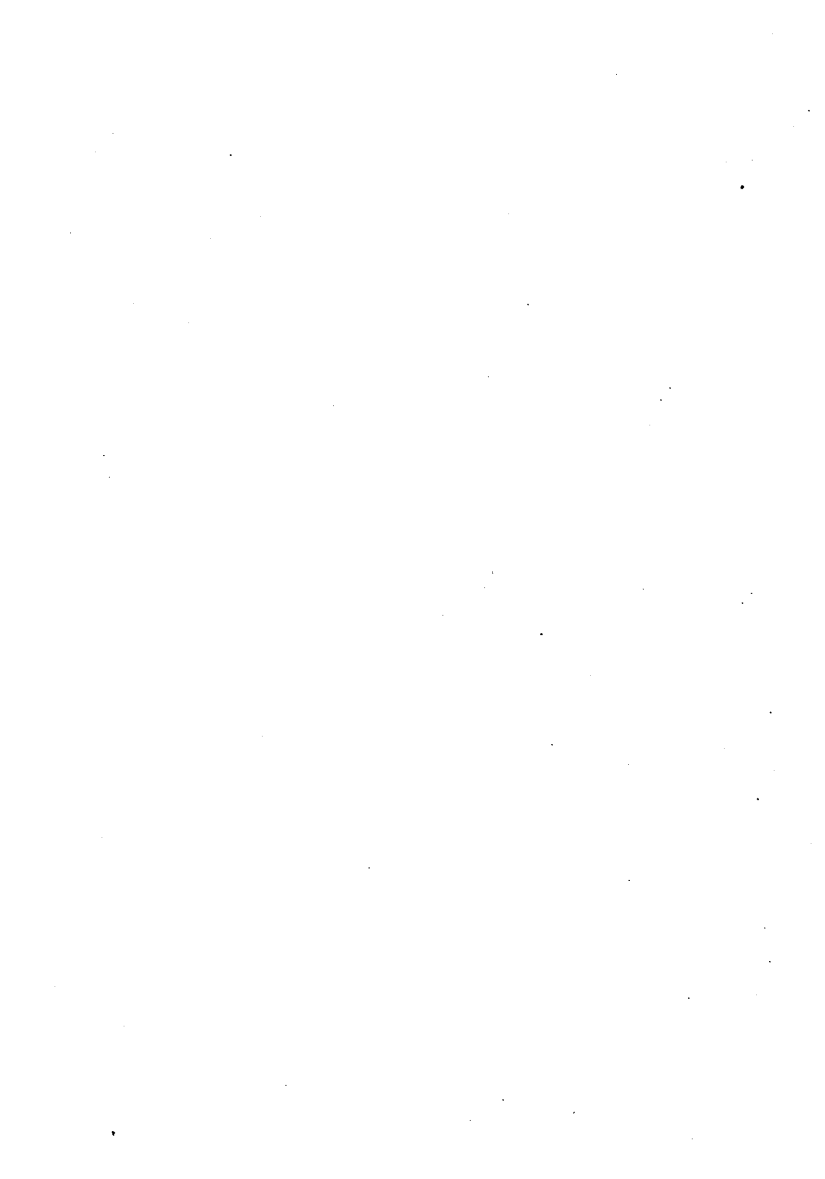
Teachers'-Meetings

sense the superior of his fellows. Ten or a dozen teachers, or even two or three, coming together every week for a free and outspoken conference over their next lesson, will be likely to gain more from that conference than would five times their number who simply listened to a brilliant and scholarly address on the subject from their pastor. A teachers'-meeting can, in fact, lead itself, in the lack of a fitting leader.

A teachers'-meeting is an essential in any well-ordered Sunday-school,—in city or country. Therefore a teachers'-meeting must be held; and, because it must be held, it can be. It is feasible in every Sunday-school, because it is a necessity there. In this thing, as in other things, "where there's a will there's a way;" and here there must be a will in order that there may be a way.

III

Methods of Conducting



III

Methods of Conducting

At least two persons are necessary for a teachers'-meeting. With that number secured,—one as the leader, and the other as the led,—a teachers'-meeting, in preparation for lesson teaching, is practicable in any community. Beyond that number, the more the better for all concerned. Where the meeting is held, and when it is held, are, as has been shown, practical questions that must be decided by those having the matter in charge, in view of the circumstances of the particular locality. The general purpose of the meeting must, however, be the same in every instance, however varied are the methods of the meeting.

A teachers'-meeting is primarily for the purpose of bringing the teachers into a better fitness for their teaching work, by means of giving to

Teachers' Meetings

each one present the benefit of the thought and study of all. The leader's first work, therefore, is, not to tell the teachers what they ought to know, and how they ought to use it, but it is to find out what they already know, or think they know, and how they are proposing to make use of their knowledge. Until the leader has this basis of work, he is not qualified to give his teachers the aid which they most need in the way of gaining added knowledge, or of using more wisely the knowledge they have. Hence it is that a wise questioning of the teachers, concerning the facts and teachings of the lesson under consideration, is the superintendent's mission to begin with.

It is, ordinarily, a mistake to look upon the teachers'-meeting as a gathering for the first study of the lesson; it ought rather to be viewed as a conference for the bringing before all the teachers the results of the lesson's separate study by each one. Therefore the leader may take it for granted, at the start, that the

Methods of Conducting

teachers are reasonably familiar with the lesson, and he may feel free to question them on that basis. If, indeed, there be present those who have not studied the lesson, this method pursued by the leader with those who have done so will be none the less effective as a means of instruction incidentally.

A devotional spirit is essential to a good teachers'-meeting, and the expression of this spirit will naturally manifest itself in brief exercises of devotion at the opening of the meeting and at its close. But it ought not to be necessary to take time from the hour of the meeting to cultivate the spirit of devotion. The teachers have come together for conference over the lesson they are to teach, and their duty is to attend to the work for which they are assembled. Their coming and their going should be in a prayerful spirit; but their moments consecrated to mutual helpfulness in preparation for Bible teaching ought not to be taken for anything else.

Teachers'-Meetings

The leader of a teachers'-meeting should have in his mind from the beginning the plan according to which he is to conduct it for the occasion. However he may vary his methods from time to time, he ought to come to every meeting with a well-defined plan for that meeting. The more familiarly he can question his teachers from the start, the more likely they are to respond freely to his questions, and to profit from the conference in which they thus have an intelligent share.

His opening questions should relate to the place of this lesson in its series; bringing out its connection with the lesson just before it, or with other portions of the record of which it is a part. From this beginning the leader's questions should go on, to draw out from the teachers their understanding of the facts and teachings and uses of the lesson before them, to its close; he, meanwhile, being ready to make such suggestions as seem needful to him, in the line of emphasis, or illustration, or correction of their statements.

Methods of Conducting

Four things concerning the lesson under examination are to be looked at, or are to be borne in mind as deserving attention, in the conduct of every teachers'-meeting; namely, the text, the teachings, the applications, and the methods of using.

The *text* includes all of the context which is necessary to make the text clear as it stands. Its examination covers the meaning of the very words of Scripture here employed. That examination will frequently disclose some startling misconception, by a relatively intelligent teacher, of the meaning of a familiar word; while it will enable the competent leader to supply the results of his fullest knowledge of the text to those who are in want of it, to a degree before unsuspected by him.

The *teachings* cover the truths taught by the words as they stand, extending to the central truth of the passage, and to its subordinate or incidental truths. An examination of these teachings, by and with the teachers, will enable

Teachers' Meetings

the leader to know the bent of mind and character, and the doctrinal strength and weakness, of his teachers severally, as would otherwise be impossible to him. And ten wise words from the leader at the right time in the course of such an examination, would be likely to effect more for the correction of a teacher's error, or for the supply of a teacher's lack, than ten lectures delivered by him without his knowledge of the teacher's particular need now disclosed to him.

The *applications* are the practical bearings of the lesson-truths on character and life and duty. Here it is, peculiarly, that there is a gain in bringing out the views of different teachers, rather than attempting to give to all the views of one. No teacher or leader is so bright that his mind would see all the applications of a lesson truth, which might be brought out by ten or twenty bright teachers, of different modes of life and thought. Any correction or improvement of these, for which the leader is competent, is timely just here.

Methods of Conducting

The *methods of using* the lesson, and its teachings, are the ways by which the teachers are to present and apply and illustrate those teachings to their scholars. This covers the whole range of the teaching process, as applicable to all grades and kinds of scholars. Valuable hints and suggestions in this line are likely to be brought out by different teachers, as a result of their skill and experience in teaching; and if the leader be a better teacher than any of those whom he leads, he can make his superiority a benefit to all, by his supplemental hints and suggestions.

First, What is said? Second, What is meant? or What is taught? Third, What is this to us, and to our pupils? Fourth, How shall this be made clear? The words; their lessons; their uses; their showing. These points are to be brought out from the teachers, or to be brought before them, by wise questioning. The leader must know what he wants to teach or to learn, and he must be ready to supply any lack on the

Teachers'-Meetings

teacher's part, so that what he has in his mind at the start shall be in their minds before the close of the meeting ; and the best that they have to give is also his possession. On the one hand, they may gain from his knowledge and suggestions. On the other hand, he may be benefited by their thoughts and questions.

In some schools the leader can call on his teachers by name for answers ; wisely directing his questions according to their special attainments and capacity. In other schools this will not do, because of the danger of embarrassing the teachers. He must know what he can do safely, and what he cannot ; and he should keep himself within his limitations of ability and tact.

Of course, it is not to be understood that every lesson is to be taken up for specific treatment in this fourfold way ; but it is to be understood by every teachers'-meeting leader that these four elements of knowledge are essential to a fitting preparation of a teacher for the wise use in his class of the lesson under consideration

Methods of Conducting

by him, and that all four of them are to receive due attention in their time and place. It is, therefore, important for the leader to find out, in passing along, whether any of the words of the text are misunderstood by the teachers; whether the teachers have an intelligent idea of the truths taught by the lesson; whether they see the applications of those teachings to the practical life of to-day; and whether they know just how they are to illustrate and apply them to their scholars severally.

In comparing the results of study in a teachers'-meeting, the leader is to do more by his questioning of the teachers than by his words of address to them. It is a great deal more important that he should find out what they know, or what they think, than that they should find out, just then and there, what he knows or what he thinks. A teachers'-meeting ought always to have the conversational character. A lecture is out of place in a teachers'-meeting. It deprives the meeting of its prime

Teachers' Meetings

value, and it is very likely to kill the meeting, or to make it a practical failure. Lecturing and teaching are distinct and dissimilar exercises. A good lecture to teachers may be of decided value in its place and time, but it does not lead teachers in the mutual examination of the lesson in hand. Lecturing the teachers is never the leading of a teachers'-meeting—whoever attempts it.

How to teach the lesson considered, is a question of practical importance in every teachers'-meeting. Most teachers know more than their pupils know. Most teachers know more of the lesson they want to teach, than they can cause their pupils to know. In other words, most teachers know more of the lesson than they can teach; for the essence of teaching is causing another to know, and one who cannot cause another to know, cannot teach. Hence it is quite as necessary in the teachers'-meeting to help teachers to know *how* to teach the lesson, as to help them to know *what* to teach of it, or

Methods of Conducting

by it. In this line teachers can help one another, and the leader ought to be able to help all.

Asking particular teachers how they propose to teach to their pupils the main truth of the lesson, is one way of getting suggestions of wise methods of teaching. In some cases it may be well for the leader, or one of the teachers, to take the teachers'-meeting in hand, and teach the lesson to its members as if they were a class. After this has been done, comments on the teaching, or suggestions as to it, may be asked for from the others. Thus the teachers'-meeting may, for the time being, be a normal class.

Where teachers are backward in taking part in the teachers'-meeting, or where a teachers'-meeting is being started among those who think that the teachers in that school will not be ready to answer any questions, it may be well for the leader to help along by assigning particular questions, or subjects, to particular teachers. This may be done in various ways. The leader may, in advance, ask one teacher to be ready to

Teachers' Meetings

tell what is known of the author of the book of the Bible from which the lesson is taken; another to give facts about the place where its events happened; another to point out any parallel, or correspondent, passage or incident in the Bible record; and so on. The answers may be given to him in writing, if the teachers are reluctant to speak out.

Again, the leader may distribute in advance slips of paper to several teachers, with the request that they will write, in a few words, the main thought or truth of the lesson as they understand it, and return the slips to him, to be read aloud in the meeting, or to be called out by him in response to his oral questions. Yet again, he may quietly designate, a week beforehand, particular teachers for the answer of special questions on the lesson text, in order that they may come prepared to have an active part in the meeting.

The advantage of such methods is, that inexperienced or bashful teachers will be given

Methods of Conducting

something to work at, and be helped to take an intelligent share in the common exercise, while they are an example and encouragement to others. It is not well to give much prominence to these modes of helping some teachers to take a part, lest other teachers should wait to be similarly helped. The better way is for the leader to go on with the lesson as if he were relying on all present to have a share, and then to make use of these results of special preparation as they come along in their place.

There is no one way of conducting a teachers'-meeting that can fairly be called the best way. Each school requires its own line of treatment, and each leader will do his work according to his own judgment, and his own idea of the special needs of his teachers. Yet every leader, whether experienced or a novice, is ready to learn from the ways of others, and is glad to consider a suggestion or an example of methods deemed practicable.

Methods differ according to the nature of the

Teachers' Meetings

lesson under examination. If it is in the narrative form it must be differently handled from a passage including commands, or an exhortation, or a statement of doctrine.

An illustration may be given of several points in the treatment of a narrative lesson, by way of suggestion. The text of the narrative is read by the leader, or by one of the teachers, with a request for special attention to it on the part of all present. Then, when the Bibles are closed, the leader asks a teacher to give, in his own words, the substance of what has just been read. Afterwards he calls on another teacher to say if aught was omitted or added in the recital, and, if so, what? Other teachers are asked for further corrections. In this way the facts of the lesson are brought clearly before the minds of all.

The lesson is one of the International series, from Daniel 3: 13-18, entitled "The Brave Young Men." It having been read by a teacher, the leader begins as follows:

Methods of Conducting

Leader.—Will Miss Brown give, in her own words, the substance of the lesson which has just been read?

Miss Brown.—Nebuchadnezzar ordered the three young men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, to be brought before him. When they came, he asked them if it was true that they had refused to worship the golden image he had set up. Then he said that if they did not fall down and worship that image when they heard the sound of the music, they should be cast into a fiery furnace, where no God could help them.

Leader.—Will Mr. Thompson go on with the narrative?

Mr. Thompson.—The three young men said that they were not anxious in this matter. Their God was able to deliver them out of the fiery furnace, and, any way, they would not worship the image Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Leader.—Were there any important omissions from, or additions to, the Bible narrative

Teachers' Meetings

in these recitals? Any teacher may name such as he noted.

Mr. Williams.—Miss Brown omitted to say that Nebuchadnezzar was very angry when he sent for the three young men.

Miss Johnson.—She did not mention that he asked them if they refused to serve his gods.

Miss Smith.—Mr. Thompson failed on the same point. He forgot to say that the young men said they would not serve Nebuchadnezzar's gods, any more than they would worship the image.

Mr. Jones.—He also omitted their assurance that God would deliver them out of the king's hands.

Miss Wilson.—Miss Brown omitted Nebuchadnezzar's assurance to them that it would be well with them if they would worship the image.

Leader.—There was an addition to the narrative concerning these three men made by both Miss Brown and Mr. Thompson, and repeated

Methods of Conducting

by at least two of the teachers who have criticised them. Can any one tell what that addition was?

Miss Denton.—Was it calling the men “young” men?

Leader.—Were they not young?

Miss Denton.—This narrative does not say they were.

Mr. Bennett.—But they are called “The Brave Young Men” in the title of the lesson.

Leader.—That may be. But we are now considering what these Bible verses tell, not what we are led from other sources to infer about the men it mentions.

As to the main teachings of the lesson, the leader asks for volunteer expressions of opinion. Thus:

Leader.—Will any teacher say what important truth seems to be taught by this incident?

Miss Johnson.—If a command of any ruler calls for a violation of an explicit command of God, it ought not to be obeyed by a child of God.

Teachers' Meetings

Leader.—What explicit command of God forbade the obeying of Nebuchadnezzar's command?

Miss Johnson.—The Second Commandment?

Mr. Thompson.—A breach of the First Commandment, also, was implied in the command of King Nebuchadnezzar.

Leader.—How so?

Mr. Thompson.—Nebuchadnezzar wanted his gods, as well as his image, to be worshiped. He refers to that when he asks the Hebrews if they will not worship his gods.

Leader.—That is so. And now is any other great truth taught in the lesson?

Mr. Williams.—The question of the consequences of doing right is not to stand in the way of a determined refusal to do wrong.

Leader.—Yes. There is also a comforting truth taught here. God can help his children in any extremity. He can be trusted to do what is best.

Now, a few words as to the applications, and mode of using the lesson.

Methods of Conducting

Leader.—Miss Brown, you have a class of wide-awake boys; how do you propose to present this lesson to them?

Miss Brown.—I intend, after going through the story with them, to bring it right home to themselves by questioning them about their temptations to do wrong; to drink, or smoke; to go to the theater, or circus; to use profane language; to do as 'all the other boys' seem to; and then I shall try to show them that they are asked in this way to worship a vile image, with the threat of being laughed at, and cast into a furnace of social contempt; and that it is their duty to stand right up bravely and defy their tempters, trusting in God to keep them safely.

Leader.—Mr. Thompson, you have a class of "mothers in Israel," how shall you bring this lesson home to them?

Mr. Thompson.—I intend to bring out the lesson of the sublime faith of these men for my class. I shall dwell on the *rest* of their trust in

Teachers'-Meetings

their God. They could leave everything to him. They didn't care what Nebuchadnezzar proposed, or did. One thing was certain, their God *could* take care of them, and *would*. They were going to trust him, and worship none other than God. Then I shall help my scholars, by questioning, to see that in all their fiery trials of bereavement, or sorrow, or sickness, or sin, they have the same rest in the same God.

These are merely suggestions as to modes of treating a lesson in the teachers'-meeting. They are not models or patterns. At the best they are but illustrative. Other and better ways will be found by a leader to work well in his field, as he gains in practice and skill. Further suggestions as to wise methods in the teachers'-meeting are to be found in the author's "A Model Superintendent" (pp. 44-50); and his "Teaching and Teachers" (pp. 116-137).

Reviews ought to have a place in the teachers'-meeting. Quarterly Review Sunday is quite as important as any other Sunday of the quarter;

Methods of Conducting

yet it is not welcomed by all teachers as it should be. The teachers'-meeting preceding Quarterly Review Sunday might well be given to the subject of reviews. Different methods of review may be canvassed, and the best decided on.

This is a good time to learn what the teachers have taught during the quarter; and as to this the superintendent needs information. Each teacher may indeed be asked what truth he emphasized in his class from each lesson of the quarter. A few teachers may be taken as specimens for this exercise, for one meeting; and thus, in turn, all may be examined.

Mere repetition is not review. A good review is a new view. The lessons reviewed on Review Sunday are to be looked at not only separately, but collectively; and it is in the teachers'-meeting that a wise leader can learn from his teachers, and can help his teachers to learn, how to do this.

In one way or another, and in one way and

Teachers' = Meetings

another, a teachers'-meeting can be so conducted as to make it helpful to all the teachers, and profitable to the whole school. A teachers'-meeting conducted in the best way is desirable for any school. A teachers'-meeting conducted in the best way, or in a poorer way, is feasible in every school. If a Sunday-school has not a teachers'-meeting of some sort, it is not really entitled to be called a Sunday-school. The superintendent might say to such a school, with reference to its lack of a teachers'-meeting: "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead."

2-

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO



48 438 439

510622

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO



48 438 439

